

T H E C L E V E L A N D M U S E U M O F A R T

PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106
TELEPHONE 421-7346

For release: July 10, 1968

AFRICAN TRIBAL SCULPTURE LENT TO CLEVELAND MUSEUM

An important private collection of African art opens today (July 10) at The Cleveland Museum of Art. The collection was assembled by Mrs. Katherine White Reswick of Cleveland who acquired her first African object, a Bakongo witch-doctor's whistle, nineteen years ago. The collection now includes more than 280 works of art all of which are in the exhibition. The works represent nearly 60 different tribal groups and range in time from 16th century stone sculpture to a few contemporary sculptures from the rapidly fading twilight of African tribal art. The majority of objects were produced near the turn of the century.

In describing the collection Mrs. Reswick declares that "the absolutely compelling criteria has been art; I have tried to find objects that are beautiful. There may be some cultural anthropology to be learned from this exhibit but my reasons for showing it publicly are based entirely on its merits as art".

The collection is documented and geographically located by tribe in a catalog, AFRICAN TRIBAL IMAGES. The author is William Fagg, Deputy Keeper of African Collections in the Department of Ethnography at The British Museum in London. In the prologue Mr. Fagg says: "I have tried ... to match the extraordinary dynamics, the dynamism, of collection and collector alike --- for they have become one as no others that I have seen. Almost every piece seems to have been collected for a different reason. Some pieces have been acquired because they are masterpieces, others because they are not masterpieces. It

(continued)

was Mrs. Reswick's wish that I should catalogue them 'warts and all', and of course I could not have done it on any other basis." And Dr. Sherman E. Lee, Director of The Cleveland Museum of Art, in the catalog's forward, says Mrs. Reswick's collection is "an extraordinary achievement of collecting, knowledge, and taste".

The most widely represented sculpture in the exhibit are dance masks, all of which demonstrate a powerful iconic force. Brought out once or twice a year from smoky roof spaces for a funeral, festival or other special occasion, they witnessed the most deeply significant tribal rites and were usually worn along with elaborate costumes. Also included in the exhibition are portrait or representative figures which generally served as talismans, or as dwelling places for the spirits of ancestors, or persons absent or deceased. Shown as well are jewelry, textiles (one piece executed in a remarkably sophisticated technique which antedates European use by centuries), dolls, decorative boxes, utensils, stools, pipes, ceremonial axes, staffs and throwing sticks, musical instruments (including a trumpet, harps and a "piano") and divining implements. With a few exceptions Africans, when working in wood, carved even the most elaborate forms from a single block of wood and the basic premise for practically all they produced was that art was not a replica of an object or person but the embodiment of an idea about them.

Closing September 1 in Cleveland, the AFRICAN TRIBAL IMAGES exhibition will then be shown at the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia from October 10 through December 1, 1968. The catalog is published by The Cleveland Museum of Art and will be distributed by the Case Western Reserve University Press.